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AUTHOR Harton, Jack H.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a description of the Old Dominion University's (Virginia) Reference Librarian Orientation Program designed to ease the transition of reference librarians new to the school and its reference department. The program introduces the reference librarian to the library, the reference department, and the university itself and consists of 3 weeks of scheduled meetings, training sessions, and observation periods, followed by 5 weeks of working with reference librarians on the reference desk. The orientation plan provides information on how the program is to be supervised; outlines the program and explains each component listed in the outline; presents a suggested checklist for the Head of Reference to follow when meeting with the new reference librarian; offers a checklist of personnel/university information necessary for a new librarian; and presents an assigned and optional reading list of materials concerning the reference department, the library, and the university. (GLR)

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# REFERENCE LIBRARIAN ORIENTATION / TRAINING PROGRAM

## OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY NORFOLK, VA

JACK H. HARTON
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

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## INTRODUCTION

As a formal means of helping ease the transition of reference librarians new to Old Dominion University, the Reference Department of the University Library has created an orientation program specifically designed to act as an introduction to the reference department, the library, and the university, as well as providing the basic level of knowledge necessary for a reference librarian at O.D.U. A period of time lasting approximately the first two months of employment has been designated for the new reference librarian to complete the reference librarian orientation program, which consists of three weeks of scheduled meetings, training sessions, and observation periods, followed by five weeks of working with reference librarians on the reference desk. This program is intended to meet the orientation needs of a librarian with limited reference experience and/or just out of library school. However, the structure of the program is such that it can be changed or shortened to reflect those reference librarians new to O.D.U. with previous reference experience or training.

Since the Reference Department of the University Library at Old Dominion University has on its staff a library instruction librarian, the training and orientation of bibliographic instruction for the new reference librarian will be conducted as a separate program independent of this one.

On the pages following this introduction the reader will find a description of the reference librarian orientation program. This description includes how the program is to be supervised, an outline of the program and explanations of each component listed in the outline, a suggested checklist for the Head of Reference to follow when meeting with the new reference librarian, a checklist of personnel/university information necessary for a new librarian, and an assigned and optional reading list of materials concerning the reference department, the library, and the university.

**PROGRAM SUPERVISION**

The reference librarian orientation program is under the overall supervision of the Head of Reference and the day-to-day supervision of the orientation program coordinator. The coordinator, appointed by the Head of Reference, is responsible for managing all aspects of the orientation program, including:

* explaining to the new reference librarian the objectives and components of the orientation program;

* discussing the program with the new reference librarian in terms of what changes might be feasible considering the new reference librarian's previous reference experience and training, and then recommending appropriate changes to the Head of Reference;

* scheduling meetings and training and observation sessions for the first week of the program. From the second week of the program to its conclusion the new reference librarian should be allowed to write his/her schedule, subject to the guidelines of the program and the coordinator's review;

* monitoring and evaluating in conjunction with the Head of Reference the progress and proficiency of the new reference librarian in acquiring needed reference skills;

* acting as a liaison between the new reference librarian and librarians involved in the orientation, and with appropriate departments on campus;

* offering suggestions and feedback concerning the program to the new reference librarian when appropriate;

* meeting with the new reference librarian on a consistent basis, to check scheduling and discuss problems or comments the new reference librarian might have, with a more in-depth meeting held once a week;

* meeting with the Head of Reference as least once a week to discuss how the program is proceeding;

* submitting in writing at the end of the orientation program an evaluation of the new reference librarian's progress and of the effectiveness of the program itself to the Head of Reference.

The reference orientation program coordinator's responsibility is to coordinate the program. Other librarians, depending on their areas of knowledge and interest, should be utilized by the coordinator to provide orientation and training. Reference librarians will probably do most of this training, but non-reference librarians should be utilized for training purposes as well.

## DAILY ORIENTATION SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

1 hour - observation at reference desk

1 hour - library/reference department overview (includes extensive training in the online catalog)

1 hour - reference collection examination (in subject areas the new reference librarian is responsible for)

1 hour - meeting with reference librarians and staff on their non-subject responsibilities (scheduling, library instruction, reference collection management, stacks maintenance, etc.)

1 hour - Automated Reference Center (ARC) orientation (includes learning the policies and procedures necessary to staff the ARC on a short-term basis; learning what CD-Rom and online databases are available; becoming familiar with such databases, especially those on CD-ROM)

2 hours - uncommitted time (for dealing with personnel matters, campus and other tours, reading assigned materials, browsing the reference and general collections, thinking, etc.)

### WEEK 2

2 hours - continue observing at reference desk

1 hour - reference desk orientation (includes practicing with different reference databases (OCLC, EPIC, Faxon, etc.)

1 hour - meet with representatives of different library departments (Microforms, Circulation, Cataloging, etc.)

1 hour - examine reference collection with subject specialists

1 hour - continue ARC orientation

1 hour - uncommitted time

**WEEK 3**

2 hours - continue observing at reference desk

1 hour - continue meeting with representatives of different library departments

1 hour - Government Publications orientation (includes learning about the basic government document collection and how to access it; also includes becoming familiar enough with the department's policies and procedures to staff it if necessary on a short-term basis)

1 hour - continue examining reference collection with subject specialists or alone; if alone, work on sample reference questions (this will include following the same process patrons must follow when seeking information. The questions will be typical of those asked at the reference desk)

2 hours - uncommitted time

**WEEK 4**

Reference desk integration - starting this week, and for the three weeks following, the new reference librarian will work with reference librarians in providing reference services on the reference desk along with performing other duties as specified by the Head of Reference. During this month the new reference librarian will not be scheduled alone on the desk for any appreciable length of time.

**WEEK 5**

Orientation evaluation - the new reference librarian is to write an evaluation of the orientation program based on the personal record kept during the first four weeks. The evaluation should mention program strengths and weaknesses and any recommendations for future orientation.)

## REFERENCE ORIENTATION PROGRAM COMPONENTS

### REFERENCE DESK OBSERVATION

**(Weeks 1-3)**

Purpose: to allow the new reference librarian to learn about the library's patrons and how their reference needs are met at the reference desk. The new reference librarian will get an opportunity to observe different reference librarians interacting with patrons and to note what sources are used or what suggestions or referrals are made in responding to reference questions. It will also be an opportunity to learn about the ready reference collection and reference desk procedures. The total reference desk observation time scheduled during the three weeks of orientation is twenty-five hours. The new reference librarian is not expected to answer reference questions during observation; integration of the new reference librarian into regular reference desk staffing is anticipated during the fourth week. However, if the new reference librarian feels ready to be integrated into the reference desk before the end of the scheduled orientation period, a request can be made through the orientation coordinator to the Head of Reference. Also, if the new reference librarian feels the need for additional observation beyond the scheduled twenty-five hours, this can be requested.

### LIBRARY/REFERENCE DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

**(Week 1)**

Purpose: to give the new reference librarian an overview of the library and the reference department to help put the rest of the orientation in context. Included in the overview should be a tour of the library concentrating on the physical arrangement of the different library departments and the library collection; an in-depth tour of the reference department; a brief orientation to the reference desk (to be more thoroughly covered in Week 2); and extensive training in the periodicals and online catalogs.

## REFERENCE COLLECTION EXAMINATION

**(Weeks 1-3)**

Purpose: so the new reference librarian will have some time to become familiar with the reference collection in general and especially those sources most useful in providing reference services. During the first week of orientation the new reference librarian should concentrate on learning those reference sources in his/her subject area. The subject-specific pathfinders prepared by the reference department can be used to pinpoint those sources used most often in answering reference questions and thus deserving of special attention. For the second and third weeks the new reference librarian will be given tours of the reference collection by those reference librarians responsible for the subject areas of business, literature, education, performing and fine arts, the sciences, and the social sciences. During these tours the subject specialists should focus on those sources having the greatest use in answering reference questions, reference sources that may be underutilized, difficult to use, or unique in such a way to warrant extra attention, and what strengths and weaknesses exist in the part of the collection being examined. A means of doing this is for the subject specialists to prepare lists of the most commonly asked questions in their subject areas and focus their orientation on the sources used to answer these questions. During these two weeks, when not being shown the collection by subject specialists, the new reference librarian should study the collection alone, concentrating on those sources noted during reference desk observation. As a means of facilitating this, the program coordinator should prepare a list of sample reference questions for the new reference librarian to work on (this approach is more fully explained on page 9 under the section entitled "Working on Sample Reference Questions"). For the three weeks of orientation, the time allocated for studying the reference collection is designed to allow the new reference librarian to achieve a basic understanding of the most commonly used reference works. A greater understanding and knowledge of the collection will come only from working with it on a regular basis over an extended time.

## MEETING WITH THE REFERENCE STAFF ON NON-SUBJECT RESPONSIBILITIES

**(Week 1)**

Purpose: designed so the new reference librarian can see what non-subject specific duties exist within the reference department, what is entailed in these duties, and how they have been divided up among the reference librarians and staff. In the first week of orientation the new reference librarian will be scheduled to meet

with those reference librarians in charge of departmental stacks maintenance, collection management, scheduling, microcomputer coordination, and library instruction. During these meetings, the reference librarians should focus on explaining what their specific non-subject duties are, what is expected from the other reference librarians concerning these duties, and how each librarian will be aided in meeting these expectations. In addition, the new reference librarian will be scheduled to meet with the departmental clerical staff to get a tour of the reference office, files, and supply sources, and become familiar with their duties in the reference department.

**AUTOMATED REFERENCE CENTER (ARC) ORIENTATION**

**(Weeks 1-2)**

Purpose: designed for two purposes: to inform the new reference librarian as to what services and automated databases are available in the ARC for patrons; and to provide enough knowledge of the ARC's policies, procedures, and equipment so that the new reference librarian can staff the ARC desk when needed. To meet these goals the new reference librarian should use this time to gain a working knowledge of the various databases available in the ARC for purposes of patron referral from the reference desk, and to practice searching on these databases, especially those on CD-ROM, in order to help patrons when staffing the ARC desk. If the new reference librarian feels the need or desire to practice online searching in order to become more proficient in this area, online searching training sessions can be planned in conjunction with the ARC coordinator and the orientation coordinator.

**UNCOMMITTED TIME**

**(Weeks 1-3)**

Purpose: free time set aside to be used by the new reference librarian for a variety of purposes. In addition to a guided walking tour of the university campus, also included in this time are such things as reading assigned materials, dealing with personnel matters, getting additional practice on various automated systems and equipment, attending departmental meetings, examining the general collection, engaging in unscheduled or follow-up meetings or discussions, making notes about the orientation for the written evaluation due after the end of the first four weeks, or meeting with the orientation coordinator. Basically, the uncommitted time built into the orientation schedule is

discretionary time for the new reference librarian to engage in new learning, reinforce learning from training that has already taken place, or to reflect and evaluate on the orientation itself and what has been learned about the reference department, the library, the university, etc. To allow for the best use of uncommitted time, the orientation coordinator should work with the new reference librarian in supervising how this time is spent, especially in the beginning of the orientation program.

**REFERENCE DESK ORIENTATION**

**(Week 2)**

Purpose: this will be to help the new reference librarian learn the set-up of the reference desk, which includes the ready reference collection as well as the online catalog, the periodicals catalog, the desk microcomputer, and the databases available through it (OCLC, FAXON, EPIC, etc.). Also included will be such things as opening and closing procedures for the reference desk, reference materials check-out policies and procedures, telephone operation, etc. The new reference librarian should use this time, as well as suitable times during the reference desk observation, to examine the ready reference collection and practice on the online catalog and the other databases mentioned above.

**MEETING WITH LIBRARIANS/PARAPROFESSIONALS IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS**

**(Weeks 2-3)**

Purpose: to allow the new reference librarian to meet the librarians and/or paraprofessionals in other departments of the library and learn more about the functions of these departments and how they interact with or serve the public. For example, the public service that the Circulation Department provides is something with which the reference librarian should be familiar. The new reference librarian should schedule meetings with the following departments: Circulation, Microforms, Interlibrary Loan, Music Listening Room, Art Library, Archives, Collection Management, Acquisitions, Serials, Cataloging, Computer Room (Systems), and Management Services. Most of the meetings should be scheduled for one hour; selected ones will be for one-half hour. The purpose of these meetings is as stated above: for the new reference librarian to meet non-reference library staff and gain some general knowledge about the various departments in which they work and their interaction with the public. If for certain departments the time allocated for this purpose proves insufficient, more time can be set aside for follow-up meetings.

**GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS ORIENTATION**

**(Week 3)**

Purpose: for the same reasons as the Automated Reference Center (ARC) orientation, but on a more general level. Unlike the ARC, which is part of the reference department, Government Publications is a separate department within the library. This orientation period is designed to introduce the new reference librarian to the types and scope of materials in Government Publications so that appropriate referrals can be made at the reference desk. Working with the staff in Government Publications, the new reference librarian should get some idea of how their collection is arranged and how to access this material through the online catalog or the finding aids (both print and automated) in Government Publications. Also, the new reference librarian should learn enough about the policies and procedures of Government Publications to be able to staff it on a short-term basis if the need should arise.

**WORKING ON SAMPLE REFERENCE QUESTIONS**

**(Week 3)**

Purpose: so the new reference librarian can become familiar with the research process at O.D.U. from the perspective of a library user. The purpose of this is to help increase the quality of reference service provided by having the new reference librarian research examples of reference questions commonly asked at the reference desk. Subjects of typical questions could include finding literary criticisms of specific authors or works, biographical information on contemporary or historical figures, background and statistics for a specific company, business, or industry, finding citations of book reviews, etc. In researching these questions the new reference librarian should use the same sources (print or automated indexes, the online catalog, bibliographies, etc.) that a patron would be expected to use if answering the same question. The new reference librarian should keep a record of sources used and citations found in researching the questions so the results of the research done specifically on the sample questions and the research process at O.D.U. in general can be discussed with the orientation coordinator.

**REFERENCE DESK INTEGRATION**

**(Weeks 4-8)**

Purpose: this refers to the new reference librarian being incorporated into the desk schedule, working with other reference librarians in providing reference services to library patrons. For the five weeks following the end of the formal orientation program the new reference librarian will staff the reference desk on a regular basis, excluding nights and weekends or other times involving single staffing. This is to ensure that the new reference librarian will not be left alone at the reference desk for any appreciable length of time before having had an opportunity to gain some practical reference experience. It is also during this month that the Head of Reference can assign additional reference responsibilities to the new reference librarian. Full integration of the new reference librarian into the reference desk schedule, including those times of single staffing, will occur at the end of the second month subject to the approval of the Head of Reference.

**ORIENTATION EVALUATION**

**(Week 5)**

Purpose: at the end of the orientation period it is the responsibility of the new reference librarian to write and turn in to the Head of Reference an evaluation of the orientation program. This evaluation should be based on the personal record the new reference librarian kept during the orientation and should encompass all aspects of the program. The new reference librarian should include such things as impressions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, especially in the areas of management and coordination, organization, content, flexibility, and time allotted for various activities. Also to be noted should be problems that occurred in the orientation, what successes were encountered, and recommendations the new reference librarian may have concerning the implementation of the orientation program in the future.

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES CHECKLIST**

library and reference department goals and objectives

university, library, and reference department organization

job description

duties and responsibilities of each reference librarian, both general (applying to all reference librarians) and specific non-subject related duties and responsibilities (how these are determined and assigned to individual librarians)

compensation (where, when, how often paid, raises in salary)

performance objectives and evaluations (how conducted, forms used, frequency, etc.)

leave policies and procedures (explaining the different types of leave, how leave is accumulated, procedures for using leave)

scheduling policies

general benefits (tuition reimbursement and release time for taking classes, professional leave, pool and gym privileges, discount ticket prices for athletic and cultural events, consortium privileges, campus training and development workshops, etc.)

promotion policy and criteria for professional development

general description of the reference orientation program

**PERSONNEL/UNIVERSITY INFORMATION CHECKLIST**

Letter of appointment

Payroll information

Office keys

Employee benefits session

Employment verification

O.D.U. faculty identification card

University parking permit

computer account information (for using e-mail, Internet, etc.)

**CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS FOR THE NEW REFERENCE LIBRARIAN**
(obtained from the departmental or administrative support staff)

*Old Dominion University Catalog*

*Administrative Faculty Handbook*

*University Library Staff Development Program*

campus map

organizational charts of the library and the technical and public services divisions

library floor plan

library staff directory and telephone extension list

library calendar

student and faculty mini-guides

copies of the forms used most often (leave request forms, monthly attendance sheets, supply request forms, etc.)

professional organizations information (Virginia Library Association, American Library Association, Southeastern Library Association, Association of ODU Administrators, etc).

**CLERICAL CHECKLIST**

introduction to student assistants

show where supplies are kept, how to order supplies

cabinet where the request for leave forms and other forms are kept

computer supplies

photocopy procedures in the reference department

telephone procedures (transferring to reference office, etc.)

personal mailbox and bulletin board

student assistant responsibilities and schedules

**READING MATERIALS**

**Assigned**

*University Library Administrative Faculty Handbook*
*Faculty Handbook*
*Reference Department Policies and Procedures Manual*
*Automated Reference Center Policies and Procedures Manual*
*Old Dominion University: One-half Century of Service*

latest two reference department annual reports
latest four weeks of department meetings minutes.
latest year of "Library Update"

**Optional**

*O.D.U. Statistical Profile*
*Mace & Crown* (university newspaper)
*The Courier* (university periodical)

**ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ORIENTATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

* obtaining temporary parking permits for the new reference librarian's first week of work

* provide information or referrals to the new reference librarian if needed - e.g. realtor names, apartment guides, copies of the local newspapers and/or magazines, area maps, brochures and/or pamphlets of the area. This information can be provided to the new reference librarian at the beginning of employment at O.D.U. or sent prior to arrival here.

* assisting the new reference librarian in obtaining the information or items listed on the University Library Policies and Procedures Checklist, the Personnel/University Information Checklist, and the Checklist of Materials for the New Reference Librarian

* ensure the new reference librarian gets the reading materials listed above

* with the new reference librarian go over the *Administrative Faculty Handbook*, emphasizing selected parts such as the inclement weather policy, emergency closing / evacuation procedures, etc.